

Basic Introduction to Apologetics Mark Blair - October 2016

Apologetics is an answer to the “why” question after you've already answered the “what” question. The what question, of course, is, “What is the gospel?” But when you call people to believe in the gospel and they ask, “Why should I believe that?”—then you need apologetics.

I've heard plenty of Christians try to answer the *why* question by going back to the *what*. “You have to believe because Jesus is the Son of God.” But that's answering the *why* with more *what*. Increasingly we live in a time when you can't avoid the why question. Just giving the what (for example, a vivid gospel presentation) worked in the days when the cultural institutions created an environment in which Christianity just *felt* true or at least honorable. But in a post-Christendom society, in the marketplace of ideas, you have to explain *why* this is true, or people will just dismiss it... Thus a gospel-shaped apologetic must not simply present Christianity, it must also challenge the non-believer's worldview and show where it, and they, have a real problem.

Tim Keller, “In Defense of Apologetics”

Apologetics is the theological discipline that defends the truth of the Christian message. The term apologetics comes from the Greek *apologia*, *apologeisthai*, which in the NT usually refers to an individual's defense. The Bible does not discuss apologetics as an academic discipline, but it does speak about defending the faith. Defense of the gospel appears frequently in the Bible.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. 1 Corinthians 9:3

Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. Acts 19:33

“Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.” Acts 22:1

And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.” Acts 24:10

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel... I am put here for the defense of the gospel. Philippians 1:7, 16

in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect 1 Peter 3:15

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:30-31

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. Luke 1:1-4

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3

Paul's epistles contain much defense of his Gospel against objectors.

Jesus' own confrontations with opponents

God's prophetic indictments of unfaithful Israel

(In these cases especially, we should bear in mind the maxim that often the best defense is a good offense.)

From one perspective the whole Bible is apologia. For in the Bible God presents his truth over against error, speaking it into a sinful world, always having in view the objections of his opponents. The authors of the Bible, divine and human, seek to present their message cogently, rationally, persuasively.

Defending the faith, therefore, is a biblical practice. The discipline of apologetics seeks to instruct Christians in such defense. As analysis of a biblical practice, apologetics is a properly theological discipline. If theology is "the application of Scripture to all areas of life," then apologetics is "the application of Scripture to unbelief" including the unbelief that remains in Christian hearts.

John Frame, "Apologetics to the Glory of God"

Apologetics (from the Greek *apologia*: a defense) is an expression of loving God with all our minds - to *show* to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to *confirm* that faith to believers, and to *reveal* and explore the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths.

Wm. Craig Lane

Offensive apologetics seeks to present a positive case for Christian truth claims.

Defensive apologetics seeks to nullify objections to those claims by modern biblical criticism and by contemporary science to biblical theism.

Evidentialism is to show the truth of Christian theism. Typical Christian evidences include fulfilled prophecy, the radical personal claims of Christ, the historical reliability of the Gospels, and so forth.

Ex: "Evidence that Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell

The Flaw in the Exclusively Evidential Approach

The sinner is first a rationalist, in the sense that he tries to think autonomously. He believes that he can understand the world using his own mind as the ultimate standard of truth and right. But simultaneously he is an irrationalist. When he sees that his mind is, after all, not suited to serve as the ultimate standard of truth, when errors enter his thinking, he excuses himself by saying that the universe is not knowable after all. So his rationalism devolves into irrationalism. He affirms his reason without reason' John Frame

The Christian and unbeliever do not and cannot approach their differences with argumentative or philosophic neutrality. Even though the Christian and the non-Christian have the facts of the objective world in common, they have radically divergent interpretations of them. For the Christian all facts are pre-interpreted by God, created by God, and revelatory of God; they must be handled in such a way that glory is brought to God. But the non-Christian views these facts as meaningfully interpreted only by his own mind, as uncreated and free from God's control, as ambiguous and contingent; he uses them to bring glory to man. Hence the Christian and non-Christian have different interpretative schemes.'

Greg Bahnsen, "Presuppositional Apologetics"

The presuppositional argument starts with the assumption of God, for it is only on God's own testimony that we can know anything about him...if men are dead in their sins and trespasses they are dead epistemologically too Cornelius Van Til, *Presuppositionalism. A Survey of Christian Epistemology*

God created our minds to think within the Christian circle: hearing God's Word obediently and interpreting our experience by means of that Word. That is the only legitimate way to think, and we cannot abandon it to please the unbeliever. A good psychologist will not abandon reality as he perceives it to communicate with a delusional patient; so must it be with apologists John Frame

My emphasis is "presuppositionalist" (following the work of Cornelius Van Til)

1. to base all my argument on the truth of God's revelation,
2. to apply that revelation to each apologetic encounter differently as the situation calls for it,
3. to move as quickly as possible to the Gospel,
4. always expressing "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). – John Frame

God's Truth Concealed: Romans 1

a. Man(kind) Knows the True God

v. 19 what may be known about God is plain, because God has made it plain

2.15 "requirements of the law are written on their hearts"

v. 19 God's invisible qualities --his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made

v. 21 they knew God

v. 32 they know God's righteous decree

"We are blind to God's revelation, but not so blind we can plead ignorance" John Calvin

b. Refuses to Glorify God

v. 21 "not glorified him"

c. Neglects to be Thankful

v. 21 "not give thanks to him"

"The man or woman of faith is one who gives thanks. Unbelief, on the other hand, has a short and ungrateful memory." Os Guinness

"God, we worked real hard for this food, so thanks for nothing." Amen. Bart Simpson

"If he is not stupid, he is monstrously ungrateful! Phenomenally ungrateful. In fact, I believe that the best definition of man is the ungrateful biped." Dostoyevsky

d. Suppress Truth of God v. 18 “take” “hold” “hold fast” “hold back” “restrain”

The problem is that all men inescapably know their Creator but hinder that knowledge in unrighteousness, that intelligibility and knowledge are impossible outside of submission to revelation from God who is the source of any and all knowledge. Cornelius Van Til

e. Exchanges the Truth for a Lie

v. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie

v. 28 they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God

v. 21. their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

v. 22. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

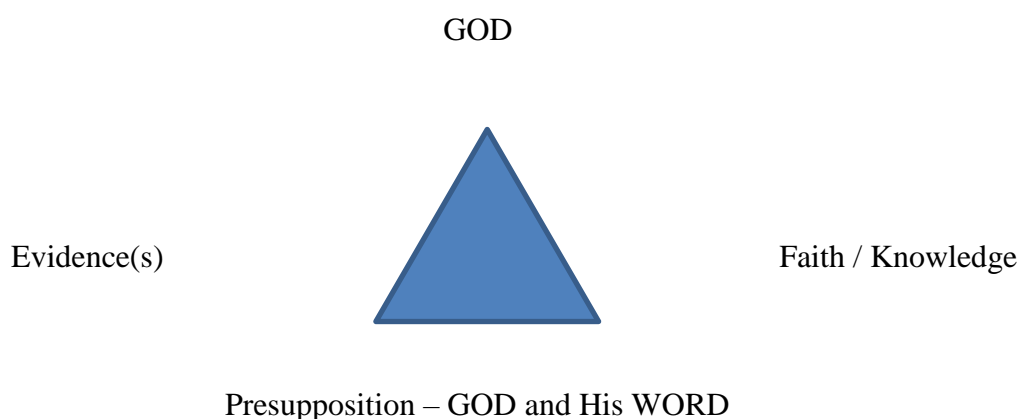
For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

f. Worships created things rather than Creator

v. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

g. Without Excuse

v. 20 so that men are without excuse.



As with all theology, the Bible is normative for apologetics. It does not teach apologetics in a focused or systematic way, even to the extent that it teaches about justification in Romans 1-5, the Resurrection in 1 Cor. 15, or the events of the last days in 1 Thess. 4-5. However, it has much to say about the theistic worldview, the nature of the Gospel, knowledge, wisdom, the noetic effects of sin and regeneration, the opposition of belief and unbelief, the Spirit’s illumination, God’s revelation in the natural world, and the role of Scripture itself as our authority for all areas of human life.

My own reading suggests that a “biblical apologetic” would take this general shape:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Prov 9:10

Wisdom and Knowledge are summed up in Jesus Christ

Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God 1 Corinthians 1:30

Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge Colossians 2:3

Though God is known through his creation, people repress this knowledge - Romans 1:18-32)

Until God’s grace renews their minds - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

The apologist should press upon the non-Christian the evidence that God is clearly revealed in nature. But he should present it in the context of a biblical worldview, with an epistemology reflecting what the Bible says about knowledge.

And he should present the Gospel in God’s own authoritative voice, using Scripture’s own arguments (as 1 Cor. 15:1-11) and other arguments that follow scriptural leads. As an example of the latter, when Scripture says that God is revealed in creation, it authorizes us to find evidence in creation to use in apologetic witness (as Paul in Lystra Acts 14:15-18, Paul in Athens 17:22-31). When it says that the events of redemption occurred at specific times and places, it authorizes us to find apologetic resources in the historical study of those times and places. Paul to Agrippa “For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.” Acts 26:26

The argument that presuppositional apologetics is “circular” (that is, that it presupposes what it intends to prove). We’ve answered that argument scores of times, it seems, but it keeps coming back again. My reply:

1. Presuppositional apologetics does not endorse *all* circular arguments, but only a small class of them, namely those designed to prove an ultimate authority for human reason.
2. *All* arguments of this type are circular in a way. If a rationalist, for example, tries to prove that human reason is the ultimate rational authority, he can do nothing else than appeal to a rational argument, using reason to prove reason. He cannot appeal to anything higher than reason, because he believes reason is the highest authority.
3. The same is true with any other attempt to prove an ultimate authority: the Islamic appeal to the Qur’an, the empiricist appeal to sense experience, the existentialist appeal to feeling, etc.,
4. The circular argument is not the end of discussion. In addition to that circular appeal, the presuppositionalist is able to show that alternative presuppositions (i.e. alternative circles) deconstruct: they cannot account for their own meaningfulness without themselves appealing to the biblical God.
5. This view is biblical, for the God of Scripture presents himself as the origin of all things: all meaning, all rationality, all goodness, and his Word claims absolute authority. John Frame
